

# Birds 1975 – 2010

This document contains a selection of my best bird photographs taken over a 25-year period. The material has been transferred from my weblog which was closed during late 2022. Since the images are currently only available in this reduced size the quality is reduced. The collection, however, provides a good impression of species and environments I have been privileged to experience, record and value.

## Bermuda (1969 – 1975)







The above were mostly taken with a Pentax Spotmatic SLR camera using 35 mm slide film. Some of the later shots were taken with a Hasselblad large format camera using normal roll film stock. All slides and negatives were carefully stored and have been re-scanned such that in many cases the full look better than the originals. I'm particularly grateful to David Wingate (pictured last row, with a Cahow, or Bermuda Petrel chick) for opening up the natural world to me and encouraging me to take up my later studies at Lancaster University. The background to some of these images, and many of the images themselves, can be found in *Birds in Bermuda* (Bermuda Bookstores Ltd, 1975) copies of which may still be available on the web.

#### UK (1975 – 1986)





There are fewer images in this section for two reasons. First, I was studying full-time. Second, Jill and I had started our family. After a foray into B&W landscape photography I decided to sell the Hasselblad. But I kept the Pentax SLRs and used them less for wildlife than for family purposes. The result is a rich tapestry of our sons growing up, the places we visited etc. There then ensued a very long gap, during which time I wrote a few books and imaging technology changed completely...

#### Australia (2005 -)





While I'd remained a keen 'birder' ever since Bermuda I'd not given bird photography much thought. That all changed when my eldest son, Rohan, gave me a digital SLR for my 60th birthday. It propelled me into the world of digital imaging. As any bird photographer knows, using film cameras to capture birds in action entailed a high degree of wastage. Moreover, unless you used an instant film back on an expensive professional camera, you could not see the results of work in the field until much later. Now, however, with immediate feedback

the wastage was eliminated. If a picture was over-exposed, out of focus, etc., then you found out pretty much at once and could correct it. Then, instead of handing over the exposed material to a distant lab, you could now bring the memory card home, put it into the computer and adjust the images at will. It was and is a new world.

Still, it was not until 2004 when I left at the Australian Foresight Institute, and Melbourne, that I again had time to go back out with the explicit intent of capturing images of birds. After that, however, I started to take every chance to do so. In Queensland, Australia, there are of course many places where one can find a dazzling array of beautiful species. The sample of images above were taken in various places including the University of Queensland, Lone Pine Koala Reserve, Magnetic Island and Caloundra.

Kakadu National Park – July 2008





At some point one has to get serious, so in mid 2008 Laurie and I headed off to Darwin to attend a bird week run by Dr Richard Noske out of Charles Darwin University. To visit an area with someone who knows its secrets and out-of-the-way places is a very different experience compared to casual birding. So we embarked on a long journey around Kakadu National Park where we were treated to close-ups of Scarlet Honeyeaters, Azure Kingfishers, Jacanas and many other species – to say nothing of huge salt water crocodiles! The place that seemed to be most brimming with life was Yellow Waters where, unfortunately, we only had an all-too-brief ride on a commercial cruise. We could have stayed all day – and longer.

After the bird week we took off with Bev and Peter Morgan (two of Laurie's semi-distant relatives both of whom are brilliant birders) to a nearby billabong where we set out on a tiny aluminium raft powered by a small outboard motor. Frankly I found it unnerving to get so close to those massive crocs lurking in the water around us, their knobby backs just showing above the surface as they'd done for millions of years. Still, it was a very bright day indeed (meaning short, sharp exposures *and* good depth of field) and I brought back some of the very best images taken on that trip. A few of them are above.

Lord Howe Island (1) – November 2008

After the Darwin/Kakadu bird week what could be next? We'd heard good things of Lord Howe Island (LHI) and I'd once seen it from high altitude en route to L.A. Then, when Ian Hutton, the resident naturalist, offered a bird week there in November off we went. Back in the Bermuda section, above, is an image of a Fairy Tern taken on the Great Sound in Bermuda many years ago. Now, on LHI, we were about to see a colony of these birds (here known as White Terns) that had started to breed there only as recently as the





late 1960s. The fact that they did so seems to be largely a result of the widespread planting of Norfolk Island Pines, which the birds prefer for nesting. Also, the proximity of humans seems to afford them some measure of protection from predators. These are magnificent birds, incredibly delicate – yet obviously tough as well – and completely unafraid of humans. A tiny sample of these and other LHI birds can be found above. Perhaps 100,000 Sooty Terns nest on the islands so we were able to get very close to some of the colonies, particularly at Ned’s Beach where the afternoon sun backlit the birds and the vegetation very beautifully. The climb up to Malabar was also rewarding not only for the Red-Tailed Tropic Birds but also for the Kestrels. The male Kestrel would perch high on the cliffs, as in the top row of the images above, and then dart out to harass the larger seabirds as if to say ‘this is MY area, so watch out!’ The Black Winged Petrels were a delight as they zoomed around the cliffs in the late afternoon, screeching and showing off their aerobatic skills.

By contrast the Flesh-Footed Shearwaters seemed clumsy as they hit the ground at speed at dusk, sometimes crashing into people or objects. Yet out on the deep water near Balls Pyramid these ocean travelers are fast and efficient flyers. The normally shy Buff-Breasted Rails normally kept their distance, but the one in the center of the above section clearly had media training as it stalked up and down outside a settlement café. We could not see the Boobies at close range because their nesting area was on an inaccessible islet, but we did get fine views of them flying overhead at times. Finally, the LHI Wood Hen is a conservation success story. After being decimated by the usual suspects they are now again re-established in various parts of the island. In summary, LHI is a bird paradise. It is well preserved and rich in wildlife on land, in the air and in the surrounding reefs. Flights and accommodation are not cheap, but it is one of the most remarkable and relaxing places I know.

Lord Howe Island (2) – March 2009





We went back to LHI for several reasons including that we'd not seen all the birds, nor had I managed to obtain all the images I wanted. I also wanted a second chance to climb Mt Gower. This time we were able to get close to the Noddies who were by now raising the last of a second brood. We also saw the winter breeding Providence Petrels and I pursued better images of the White Terns, the LHI White Eye and the LHI Golden Whistler. All of these were achieved, and more. Perhaps the stand-out moments were seeing thousands of Petrels circling near the top of Mount Gower and snorkelling within sight of Galapagos sharks in the lagoon. I also gave a presentation to a small group of interested persons at the island Museum on 'Future-Proofing LHI.'

Brisbane area 2009-2010





Due to its sub-tropical climate, there are more birds in and around Brisbane than in most other cities. The cockatoo pictures above were taken on a nearby school field. (Of course, as soon as the kids emerged, the birds left.) In early 2010 I spent quite a few hours at the back of a neighbour's garden where Kookaburras had excavated an old ant's nest several metres up a tree. Fortunately, the tree was located on a lower elevation and I was able to position myself at a level not far below that of the nest. As I watched the adult birds flying to and fro with food for their young, I realised again what true predators they are. The food was comprised of beetles, grasshoppers, caterpillars, spiders and, especially, young Blue Tongue Lizards. At one point a Channel Billed Cuckoo lurked very quietly in the area – which made the Kookaburra parents very nervous. I went away for a few days and, when I returned, the chick had left the nest but was still being fed.

We made a special trip to a secluded B&B near Maleny (Queensland) to see – and hopefully photograph – the Regent Bowerbirds who, early in the year, make a habit of coming into feed on some particularly delicious berries. In the row above I've included a Rose Crowned

Fruit Dove, a female Satin Bowerbird and also a shot of the male Regent Bowerbird, all of whom visited while we were there.

Finally here are some of the highlights from a trip to Kingaroy and the Bunya Mountains. A flock of Double Barred Finches (centre) was clearly at home resting on suitable perches near some caged birds where food was plentiful. They are usually hard to get this close to. The others posed beautifully. I could not resist the Monarch butterfly feeding on a Grevillea.

